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# Message Text

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ACTION EA-06

INFO OCT-01 SS-14 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 NSC-05 NSCE-00

ACDA-10 PM-03 EB-03 MC-01 OMB-01 SP-02 L-01 EUR-08

/055 W
---------- 119052
R 040230Z MAR 76
FM AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4727
INFO AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR
AMEMBASSY JAKARTA
CINCPAC

S E C R E T SINGAPORE 1046

LIMDIS

CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: MASS, SN, MY
SUBJECT: U.S. POLICY REVIEW OF SINGAPORE PURCHASES OF MILITARY EQUIPMENT

REFS: (A) SINGAPORE 0786; (B) KUALA LUMPUR 1014; (C) JAKARTA 2922

1. EMBASSY APPRECIATES USEFUL COMMENTS SUBMITTED REFTELS B AND C CONCERNING PROBLEM OF SINGAPORE PURCHASES OF MILITARY EQUIPMENT FROM U.S. IN SUPPORT OF ITS FORWARD DEFENSE STRATEGY. ALTHOUGH EMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR AND THIS EMBASSY ARE IN FULL AGREEMENT ON WHAT THE ESSENTIAL QUESTION IS, WE DIFFER SOMEWHAT ON THE PSOPOSED SOLUTION.

2. WE AGREE THAT THE THREAT OF COMMUNAL VIOLENCE IN MALAYSIA WOULD BE SERIOUSLY DESTABLIZING IN MAINLAND PENINSULAR SEA, AND THAT THIS POTENTIAL THREAT WOULD APPEAR AT THIS STAGE TO BE A GREATER DANGER TO THE GOM THAN THE EXISTING COMMUNIST
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INSURGENCY IN THE NORTH. WE ALSO RECOGNIZE THAT IF THE ACCELERATED

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SINGAPORE MILITARY BUILD-UP CONTINUES WITHOUT A COMMON UNDER-
STANDING BETWEEN THE GOS AND GOM OF THE RESPECTIVE
ROLES OF THEIR ARMED FORCES IN MEETING SECURITY THREATS TO
THE PENINSULA, THE GOM WILL AT SOME POINT PERCEIVE THIS AS A
THREAT TO MALAYSIA, WITH THE PROBABLE NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES
SET FORTH PARA 2 REFTEL B. THE QUESTION IS AT WHAT POINT WOULD
THE GOM PERCEIVE IT AS A DANGER AND DIVERT RESOURCES FOR MORE
IMPORTANT PRIORITIES TO MEET IT, AND WHAT SHOULD U.S. POLICY
BE IN DEALING WITH SINGAPORE'S REQUEST FOR ARMS PURCHASES?

3. WE WOULD AGREE THAT THE USG SHOULD LIMIT ARMS SALES TO SIN-
GAPORE TO A MODEST LEVEL, BUT BELIEVE IT IS UNREALISTIC TO
EXPECT THE GOS TO REFRAIN FROM CONTEMPLATING SERIOUSLY AT
LEAST SOME LIMITED KIND OF FORWARD DEFENSE STRATEGY. THE MEMORY
OF SINGAPORE'S VULNERABILITY TO THE RAPID JAPANESE MILITARY
ADVANCE DOWN THE MALAYAN PENENISULA IN WORLD WAR II IS STILL
STRONG IN SINGAPORE, AND THE GOS AND THE SINGAPORE ARMED FOR-
CES ARE CONVINCED WITH GOOD REASON THAT IF THEY WAIT UNTIL THE
ENEMY IS AT THE CAUSEWAY NO DEFENSE OF THIS ISLAND IS REALLY
POSSIBLE. FURTHERMORE, MALAYSIAN INTELLIGENCE MUST ALREADY
KNOW THE GOS HAS A FORWARD DEFENSE STRATEGY, AND WHILE THE GOM
MAY BE SUSPICIOUS OF GOS MOTIVES, IT APPEARS TO BE CONCENTRATING
NOW ON THE INSURGENCY IN THE NORTH AND HAS NOT YET DIVERTED
RESOURCES TO MEET AN IMAGINED THREAT FROM THE SOUTH.

4. ALTHOUGH WE KNOW GOS HAS CONTINGENCY PLANS INVOLVING IN-
TERVENTION IN THE MALAY PENINSULA IN A WORST CASE SCENARIO,
WE DO NOT KNOW THE PRECISE NATURE OF THESE PLANS. THEY PROBABLY
CALL FOR ONLY A LIMITED INTERVENTION IN THE STATE OF JOHORE.
HOWEVER, LEE KUAN YEW IS AN IMAGINATIVE MAN WHO BELIEVES HIS
COUNTRY IS CAPABLE OF PRODIGIOUS ACHIEVEMENTS. IT IS NOT BE-
YOND THE BOUNDS OF POSSIBILITY THAT HE COULD BE CONSIDERING MORE
DRASTIC OPTIONS INCLUDING DEFENSE OF THE LARGE CONCENTRATIONS
OF CHINESE ON THE WEST COAST OF MALAYSIA AS WELL AS THE
DEFENSE OF SINGAPORE. BUT WE ARE INCLINED TO DOUBT IT SINCE
LEE IS ALSO A REALIST AND WOULD KNOW SUCH OPTIONS WOULD SER-
IOUSLY OVEREXTEND SINGAPORE'S CAPABILITIES.

5. IN OUR VIEW U.S. ARMS SALES TO SINGAPORE SHOULD BE KETP
TO A MODEST LEVEL, BUT WE THINK THEY SHOULD BE SUFFICIENT TO
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SUPPORT AT LEAST SOME FORM OF CREDIBLE DEFENSE WHICH WOULD
NECESSARILY ENTAIL THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOME CAPABILITY TO TAKE
UP A DEFENSE BEYOND THE CAUSEWAY. HOW FAR BEYOND? WE WOULD
SUGGEST THAT THE DEVELOPMENT AND EQUIPMENT OF ARMED FORCES
SUFFICIENTLY STRONG TO CONTEMPLATE A DEFENSE PERIMETER ACROSS
ROUGHLY THE SOUTHERN THIRD OF THE STATE OF JOHORE WOULD NOT
CONSTITUTE SO GREAT A CAPABILITY THAT THE GOM COULD NOT LIVE
WITH IT. AS INDICATED ABOVE, THE GOM PROBABLY IS ALREADY

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AWARE THAT THE GOS CONTEMPLATES SOME STRATEGY OF THIS SORT.
WE WOULD PROPOSE THAT THE U.S. SANCTION THE SALE OF EQUIPMENT
WHICH IS CONSISTENT WITH SUCH A STRATEGY, AND DENY THAT WHICH
WOULD SUPPORT A MORE AMBITIOUS STRATEGY. WE RECOGNIZE THAT THERE
WILL BE DIFFICULTIES IN IMPLEMENTING A POLICY BASED ON THIS
DISTINCTION. IN AMBASSADOR'S LAST CONVERSATION WITH PM LEE,
LEE WAS OPTIMISTIC THAT HE WAS DEVELOPING A CLOSER RAPPORT
WITH HUSSEIN ONN, AND THAT THIS ULTIMATELY MIGHT PERMIT CLOSER
SINGAPORE/MALYSIAN COOPERATION ON SECURITY MATTERS. WHETHER THIS
OPTIMISM IS WELL FOUNDED REMAINS TO BE SEEN, BUT IF SO IT
MAY MAKE THE TASK OF HANDLING MILITARY SALES TO SINGAPORE
SOMEWHAT EASIER AT SOME POINT IN THE FUTURE.

6. WE DO NOT DISAGREE WITH THE POINT IN PARA 1 REF B THAT OUR
SEVENTH FLEET PRESENCE IS AN IMPORTANT FACTOR IN SINGAPORE'S
SECURITY CALCULATIONS AND THAT IT WOULD BE SELF-DEFEATING TO
DENY THIS ACCESS. WE WOULD QUESTION, HOWEVER, WHETHER IT IS
REALLY RELEVANT TO ARGUE THAT A MILITARILY SELF-SUFFICIENT
SINGAPORE WOULD BE IN A BETTER POSITION TO TERMINATE U.S.
NAVAL ACCESS. THE GOS GIVES OUR SEVENTH FLEET ACCESS PRIMARILY
TO BALANCE THE SOVIET NAVAL PRESENCE IN THE REGION.
ALTHOUGH LEE IS AMBITIOUS, EVEN HE WOULD BE WARY ABOUT DIS-
PENSING WITH A PRESENCE WHICH HELPS TO NEUTRALIZE SOVIET
FORCES.
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# Message Attributes

**Automatic Decaptioning:** Z
**Capture Date:** 01 JAN 1994
**Channel Indicators:** n/a
**Current Classification:** UNCLASSIFIED
**Concepts:** MILITARY BUILDUP, POLICIES, MILITARY SALES, DEFENSIVE CAPABILITIES
**Control Number:** n/a
**Copy:** SINGLE
**Draft Date:** 04 MAR 1976
**Decaption Date:** 28 MAY 2004
**Decaption Note:** 25 YEAR REVIEW
**Disposition Action:** RELEASED
**Disposition Approved on Date:**
**Disposition Authority:** BoyleJA
**Disposition Case Number:** n/a
**Disposition Comment:** 25 YEAR REVIEW
**Disposition Date:** 28 MAY 2004
**Disposition Event:**
**Disposition History:** n/a
**Disposition Reason:**
**Disposition Remarks:**
**Document Number:** 1976SINGAP01046
**Document Source:** CORE
**Document Unique ID:** 00
**Drafter:** n/a
**Enclosure:** n/a
**Executive Order:** GS
**Errors:** N/A
**Film Number:** D760082-0461
**From:** SINGAPORE
**Handling Restrictions:** n/a
**Image Path:**
**ISecure:** 1
**Legacy Key:** link1976/newtext/t19760394/aaaadfjp.tel
**Line Count:** 140
**Locator:** TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
**Office:** ACTION EA
**Original Classification:** SECRET
**Original Handling Restrictions:** LIMDIS
**Original Previous Classification:** n/a
**Original Previous Handling Restrictions:** n/a
**Page Count:** 3
**Previous Channel Indicators:** n/a
**Previous Classification:** SECRET
**Previous Handling Restrictions:** LIMDIS
**Reference:** 76 SINGAPORE 786, 76 KUALA LUMPUR 1014
**Review Action:** RELEASED, APPROVED
**Review Authority:** BoyleJA
**Review Comment:** n/a
**Review Content Flags:**
**Review Date:** 26 MAY 2004
**Review Event:**
**Review Exemptions:** n/a
**Review History:** RELEASED <26 MAY 2004 by greeneet>; APPROVED <20 SEP 2004 by BoyleJA>
**Review Markings:**

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EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

**Review Media Identifier:**
**Review Referrals:** n/a
**Review Release Date:** n/a
**Review Release Event:** n/a
**Review Transfer Date:**
**Review Withdrawn Fields:** n/a
**Secure:** OPEN
**Status:** NATIVE
**Subject:** U.S. POLICY REVIEW OF SINGAPORE PURCHASES OF MILITARY EQUIPMENT
**TAGS:** MASS, SN, MY, US
**To:** STATE
**Type:** TE
**Markings:** Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006